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Urban Education 2014 49: 895

DOI: 10.1177/0042085914557644

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Urban Education
2014, Vol. 49(8) 895–929
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DOI: 10.1177/0042085914557644
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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to investigate the multiple political histories that have coalesced to produce support for or resistance to the Oakland Unified School District's full-service community schools policy. It analyzes oral history interview data from eight stakeholders who represent the district's major constituencies to explore the reasons why each individual, positioned differently within the larger district system, may or may not support a seemingly democratic, community-based reform. Through their voices, the article explains how different constituencies can interpret an urban district's policies and form community-based coalitions that either further or obstruct a democratic, equity-minded reform.

Keywords

Urban district reform, social capital, equity, democratic education

Democratic education is hard work. Cultivating trust among multiple stakeholders, all of whom bring with them varying levels of social capital, is

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difficult, at best. Each community's civic capacity reflects the manifold racial, economic, and geographic histories that coalesce to place school districts in the position of bridging not just diverse opinions about how local schools should look, but different levels of access and educational opportunities that over time determine individuals' power to engage in local priority-setting and decision-making.

Analysts of urban educational regimes teach us that the prospects for any reform's success hinge on the particulars of a district's reform agenda, as well as the voices and resources that can be mobilized in support of the goals (Mossberger, 2009; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001). From a district leader's perspective, cultivating a broad-based regime that can further democratic, equitable public schooling can be daunting.

When an urban district aims to be democratic, that is, when it attempts to equitably engage different communities in the design and implementation of a reform, its task is complicated. Stakeholders who occupy the most powerful community positions usually have a greater access to and knowledge of how to voice their preferences and needs. The most marginalized community members are often systematically excluded from even the most ambitious democratic initiatives. How an urban district decides what its communities need and want requires a complex set of decisions.

The Oakland Unified School District's experiences enacting its current reform agenda exemplify the tensions and opportunities that arise when district leaders attempt to craft a large-scale, democratic reform. Since 2011, the district has designed and begun rolling out the nation's first-ever, district-wide full-service community schools policy. Yet individuals' awareness of and receptivity to this community-based reform, characterized largely by its attempts to provide wrap-around social, emotional, academic, and health-related supports that are tailored to their specific community's needs, depends in part on their personal, professional, and political status. The ways in which different stakeholders experience this ostensibly democratic reform rest on their lived histories within Oakland's diverse communities.

The purpose of this article was to analyze the multiple political histories that coalesced to produce support for or resistance to the Oakland Unified School District's full-service community schools policy. It analyzes oral history interview data with key stakeholders who represent the district's major constituencies to explore the reasons why each individual, positioned differently within the larger district system, may or may not support a seemingly democratic, community-based reform. Most participants have worked and lived in the district for decades and have experienced several waves of district

reform. Through their voices, the article explains the ways in which different local constituencies can interpret an urban district's priorities, conceive of the appropriate role for a local district, and form community-based coalitions that either further or obstruct this democratic, equity-minded reform.

We draw on three interdisciplinary concepts to guide our analysis. First, we use the concept of structural racism, which helps explain why individuals' access to opportunity is not equally available to all, but rather is "produced and regulated by institutions, institutional interactions and individuals [that] jointly and differently provide and deny access along lines of race, gender, class, and other markers of social difference" (Grant-Thomas & Powell, 2006, p. 2). Second, we draw on urban regime theory (Shipps, 2003; Stone, 1989) to analyze which local political arrangements and coalitions have shaped Oakland's evolving reform agenda and the eventual political responses to its full-service community schools model. Finally, we use the concepts of intra- and interrace social capital, which refer to the personal and institutional bonds within a racial community, as well as the cross-sector bonds of trust and cooperation across racial communities (Orr, 1999). These concepts reveal how urban district reform involves relationships between the central office and its communities, as well as how it shapes and is shaped by multiple institutional forces that merge inside a public school district.

Our data are oral histories with eight members of the Oakland Unified School District's community: a high school student, parent, teacher, principal, school board member, superintendent, former city official and community organizer, and a leader of an educational reform organization.

This study is significant because it contributes a case that departs from the most common types of contemporary district reforms, such as those that center on centralized standards-alignment, instructional coherence, or market-oriented initiatives like portfolio models. Instead, it focuses on a district-wide policy that is intended to foster bottom-up change through community support and engagement. It illuminates issues of democratic participation, as well as normative and political tensions inherent in district reforms that aim to redistribute resources based on historical decisions that perpetuated inequalities within and across communities. The article also contributes a unique framework for studying community-based urban district reform, one that suggests a less common role for the American school district by requiring leaders to build relationships across institutional and community boundaries and to account for structural disparities by designing reforms that are responsive to all communities' realities.

Background: The Oakland Context

The city of Oakland boasts one of the most diverse demographic profiles in the country. Members of different racial, ethnic, nationality, linguistic, and other cultural groups are concentrated within 78 square miles of this major California port city. Its population of less than 400,000 spans pastoral hills lined with Redwoods and Oaks, as well as crowded urban flatlands home to working-class, ethnic enclaves. On foot, one can easily traverse the city's thriving shopping districts, affluent housing communities, and parks that boast a cross-section of cultural and economic diversity. Yet, a walk to Oakland's western and eastern zones quickly reveals a starkly different picture. Racially and economically isolated communities persist in some of Oakland's oldest localities. Depressed housing and industrial districts are never far from sight.

Like most urban centers, Oakland children's life outcomes are correlated with their zip code. As one journalist put it,

Children born in the flatlands are far more likely than children in the hills to suffer from poor nutrition, be victimized by violence, and lack decent health care. An African-American child born in West Oakland is likely to die 15 years sooner than a white child of the Oakland hills. (Haddock, 2013, para 35)

For its school district leaders, Oakland's community struggles are inextricably linked with its educational ones.

Consequently, Oakland's superintendents face formidable challenges. From before the era of Marcus Foster, the city's first African American superintendent and champion of community-focused, whole-child-driven education, the district has repeatedly attempted to roll out reforms intended to counteract the pervasive effects of poverty, structural racism, and persistent inequities in the quality and outcomes of different groups' schooling.

The district's recent past is punctuated by several distinct waves of reform. In 2000, an alliance of community and religious leaders successfully launched a "small schools" movement intended to provide more personalized, innovative public schools of choice for families in certain impoverished, crime-ridden neighborhoods. Bolstered by growing national support for small schools as a novel urban district reform, as well as heavy backing from the Gates Foundation, the district embarked on an effort to close or divide many traditional, comprehensive public schools and replace them with more than 40 new small schools. Although some academic results looked promising, Oakland's overall struggles remained, and the new arrangements sometimes added logistical and financial challenges. Gates and other funders eventually pulled their investments.

In 2003, California assumed control of the district for fiscal insolvency. At the time of the takeover, the state estimated that the district had run up a deficit of at least US\$37 million. In 2009, when the state returned control to the local school board, the district's debt had increased to US\$89 million. By some accounts, the state appeared concerned more with advancing small schools and charters, and revamping central office services, than alleviating financial problems (Murphy, 2010). Under state receivership, the district hemorrhaged more than 17,000 students, while charter school enrollment experienced an unprecedented expansion from 2,000 to 8,000 students.

In 2011, Superintendent Tony Smith unveiled an ambitious strategic plan that sought to alleviate the persistent, systemic patterns of racial, socioeconomic, and other forms of inequity within Oakland's public schools. While the plan contained a variety of programs to address students' social, emotional, physical, and academic needs, such as the African American Male Achievement initiative (Nasir, Ross, Mckinney de Royston, Givens, & Bryant, 2013), its centerpiece was the creation of district-wide, full-service community schools by 2016. This reform was based on the rationale that each school could serve as a comprehensive site for families to access health, housing, recreation, academic, and other services that were specific to their local community (Haddock, 2013). The ideal community school would encompass before- and after-school enrichment programs; family support centers; medical, dental, and mental health services; adult education and job training; voluntary academic, interpersonal, and career assistance; and regular community engagement around curriculum, student learning, and community problem-solving. In such schools, the school sees the community as a resource for the school, and the community views the school as a resource for itself. District-wide community schools represent a democratic conception of the role of a local school district and its relationships with communities. These schools are equitable and culturally responsive, and their resources are integrated into the landscape of the community. As a full-service community school district, Oakland aimed to foster collaboration among key stakeholders, as well as a sense of collective responsibility for the success of all students, families, and the community.

In 2013, Dr. Smith unexpectedly stepped down as superintendent due to personal circumstances. In his place, longtime board member and Oakland community leader Dr. Gary Yee was appointed to serve as Oakland's superintendent for 1 year. He strongly supported his predecessor's full-service community schools plan, and his deep roots in Oakland as a respected resident and leader positioned him well to step in and continue the work that Smith started.

Literature Review

This study sits at the intersection of three fields of literature: research on urban district reform, specific investigations of Oakland's school district, and the emerging work on full-service community schools.

Urban District Reform

Studies of urban district reform vary widely. Some researchers have taken up questions about districts' internal capacity for change (Spillane & Thompson, 1997), central office relationships with intermediaries (Honig, 2004), and district actors' interpretation and implementation of state policy (Coburn, Toure, & Yamashita, 2009; Spillane, 1998). Others have explored the qualities of successful district leadership (Leithwood, 1995; Waters & Marzano, 2006), and tensions between central authority and school site autonomy (Hightower, 2002; Simmons & Codding, 2006). Yet the largest share of this research examines the relationship between different district governance structures and student performance, usually measured by standardized test scores (Trujillo, 2013c). In the minority are studies that consider the political forces that shape district reforms (Honig, 2009; Marsh, 2007; Trujillo, 2013a, 2013b). Large-scale political analyses situate urban districts amid broad municipal contexts that highlight how formal and informal arrangements affect reforms' nature and outcomes (Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescaleaux, 2001; Orr, 1999; Shipps, 2003, 2012).

Collectively, this field teaches us about the technical characteristics of urban district policies that are tied to higher test scores and about the nuances of implementation. Less often, these studies explain the political factors that shape district policymaking and reform. But the ways in which a district's political history is encapsulated by specific stakeholders, and how individuals' positionalities shape their interpretations of a district reform, is less understood.

Empirical Investigations of the Oakland Unified School District

Oakland has been the focus of several case studies that examine the complexities of educational governance and politics. For instance, Honig (2003, 2004, 2012) uses organizational theory to explore how Oakland's central office staff worked with school leaders to improve professional capacity and facilitate school-community partnerships. Using Malen's framework for the politics of implementation, she also analyzes how external organizations come to collaborate with district personnel (Honig, 2009). Epstein (2012)

draws on critical race theory to illustrate how inattention to structural racism, coupled with corporate and government interests, has perpetuated patterns of low quality in Oakland schools. She also investigates the interplay among electoral politics, protests, and resident policymaking to demonstrate how stakeholders and levels of governance interact to influence policy (Epstein, Lynch, & Allen-Taylor, 2012). Noguera (2004) argues that local governance models do not facilitate more democratic accountability in Oakland neighborhoods with low social capital. And Ansell, Reckhow, and Kelly (2009) use social network analysis to show that an advocacy coalition supporting Oakland's small schools movement could have been reformed to reflect a more expansive, civic perspective.

This research contributes a great deal to the knowledge base on Oakland's governance, reform coalitions, and its policymaking. However, these studies tend to highlight only a handful of stakeholders engaged in and affected by the reform itself. Still needed are studies that include a broad, diverse array of perspectives from various stakeholders who are affected by or deeply engaged in Oakland's educational reform.

Full-Service Community Schools

With the Obama administration's Promise Neighborhoods and other highly publicized career-to-college models such as the Harlem Children's Zone, researchers are beginning to examine full-service community schools as one type of urban district reform. Often assuming the form of program evaluations, this work examines a variety of organizations, including national networks such as Children's Aid Society (Clark & Grimaldi, 2005) and Schools of the 21st Century (Henrich, Ginicola, & Finn-Stevenson, 2006); state-funded approaches such as California Healthy Start (Newman, 1995); and more local initiatives (Dobbie & Fryer, 2011; Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002; Santiago, Ferrara, & Quinn, 2012; Whitehurst & Croft, 2010). Much of these evaluations suggest that community schools may positively affect student achievement, decrease high-risk behavior, and improve general family well-being and parental involvement (Blank, Johnson, Shah, & Schneider, 2003; Blank & Shah, 2003; Dryfoos, 2000).

Other work proposes "best practices" for designing and sustaining full-service community schools. This literature is usually driven by theories about whole-child development, early intervention, parental involvement, and after-school programming. It describes the steps, successes, and challenges faced by community school leaders, parents, teachers, and agency directors as they initiate and sustain this comprehensive reform (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Blank, Berg, & Melaville, 2006; Blank et al., 2001; Blank, Jacobson,

& Melaville, 2012; Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002; Dryfoos, Quinn, & Barkin, 2005; Santiago et al., 2012; Tough, 2008). This emerging field tends to target practitioner audiences. It is often the product of advocacy groups and think tanks, and it varies in rigor and validity, in part due to the challenges of attributing a variety of measures to a bundle of supports (Dryfoos, 2000).

This study contributes to these three fields of literature by providing a micro-level analysis of the ways in which individual stakeholders' histories shape their understandings and behaviors regarding Oakland's district-wide community schools' reform. It includes perspectives from a more diverse array of stakeholders than previously examined, while examining the historical legacies of the city's reform coalitions and Oakland's multiple sociopolitical contexts that shape how they experience this community-based reform.

Conceptual Framework

To understand the ways in which Oakland's political and social history has affected the level of engagement and investment of diverse stakeholders in its reform efforts, we guide our analysis with concepts from powell's framework on structural racialization and targeted universalism, as well as constructs from urban regime and social capital theory. These frameworks enable an analysis that attends to power and how it is distributed across actors.

Structural Racialization and Targeted Universalism

Our research builds on the premise of powell's (2008) framework, which is that institutions like school districts must be keenly aware of and responsive to institutional racialization to promote more equitable outcomes for students, families, and marginalized communities. *Racialization* is defined as "the set of practices, cultural norms, and institutional arrangements that are both reflective of and simultaneously help to create and maintain racialized outcomes in society" (powell, 2008, p. 785). This framework assumes that implicit biases and practices of interinstitutional arrangement continue to distribute inequitable outcomes along racial lines. Thus, powell argues that of main concern is the imposition of seemingly neutral programs onto already inequitable institutional arrangements, which will likely leave arrangements unchanged or serve to intensify them. He argues for the development and implementation of reforms that promote *targeted universalism*. Rejecting universal strategies that do not acknowledge differences among racialized groups, he posits that a targeted universal strategy is one that attends to the needs of both dominant and marginal groups while paying particular attention to needs of marginalized racial groups (powell, 2008).

Urban Regime Theory

powell also acknowledges the obstacles inherent in enacting targeted universalism strategies. Concepts from urban regime theory help further our understanding of these challenges. Urban regime theory reconceptualizes the role of the state in that it assumes that political mobilization is not solely the work of government officials and institutions (Stone, 2008). These theorists blur would-be distinctions between political, economic, nonprofit, and social spheres, expanding the notion of politics and government to one of governance, whereby political mobilization includes a broader alliance of governmental and nongovernmental actors (Shipps, 2008; Stone, 2008). It shows how the constitution of a governing coalition required to successfully advance a reform agenda depends upon the goals of the reform itself. Over the years, researchers have considered the composition of these governing coalitions in the context of large-scale educational reform, as well as the challenges to maintaining progressive social-oriented regimes (Bulkley, 2007; Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescaleaux, 2001; Mossberger, 2009; Orr, 1999; Shipps, 2003, 2012; Stone, 2008).

This theory moves away from conceptualizing power in the Weberian sense as something that necessarily involves the imposition of one actor's ideas and agenda onto others. Instead, it asserts the importance of "power to," or that actors can work with others to enable stakeholders to act in a manner not otherwise available to them (Stone, 2006). Conceptualizing power in this way enables an analysis of informal and formal relationships that affect reform. It illuminates more and less visible aspects of governance.

Related to these concepts is the notion of civic capacity. Civic capacity, defined as the ability to set goals and effectively pursue them through the mobilization of resources and coalition actors (Henig et al., 2001; Shipps, 2003), highlights how coalitions may vary depending on the agenda and local history. This construct surfaces the "political and economic characteristics of context that affect regime formation" (Shipps, 2008, p. 97). Overall, the concept highlights the importance of civic mobilization and issue definition, and it exposes the challenges that arise as reformers aim to maintain a governing coalition comprised of a diverse set of stakeholders (Ansill, Reckhow, & Kelly, 2009).

While urban regime theory and the concept of civic capacity highlight the importance and challenges involved in coalition building and coalition maintenance, some interrogate its inattention to race as "an important confounding factor in the development of civic capacity" (Henig et al., 2001, p. 7). Horan (2002) notes the need for regime theorists to look beyond the interactions among elite coalition members because of the role race plays in generating

and maintaining distributions of resources that differentially enable individuals to gain entrance and power within coalitions. Henig et al. (2001) also illustrate the importance of race in regime building and mobilizing civic capacity. They demonstrate how Black leadership does not necessarily lead to more civic capacity or the inclusion of marginalized racial groups into reform coalitions. They note, “In each city racial factors have made long-term collaboration on school reform more difficult . . . Most obvious are explicit racial distrust and struggle; obviously tradition makes it difficult to develop and sustain relationships” (Henig et al., 2001, p. 291). In this way, racial tension and distrust may inhibit community outreach and engagement with reforms and thus prevent the development and maintenance of multiracial coalitions.

Racialized Social Capital

One construct through which mistrust can be examined is social capital. Putnam (2000) describes social capital as the “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p. 19). Given the relational nature of regime governance, social capital is a critical ingredient in governing within an intergroup context as various groups and stakeholders aim to coordinate their efforts to enact reform. In examining the interplay between social capital and race, Orr (1999) suggests that intergroup social capital, or “the cross-sector formations of mutual trust and networks of cooperation that bridge the black-white divide” (p. 8), is often complicated by intragroup social capital. While acknowledging the solidarity and power that often arise from intragroup social capital, he notes that it may “simultaneously encourage ‘norms of exclusion’ and intergroup conflict” (Orr, 1999, p. 10). Thus, racialized social capital is a construct that recognizes the manner in which relationships and varying degrees of trust and cooperation form among stakeholders, while also highlighting community-level dynamics that help explain different levels of community engagement.

We draw on these constructs to guide our analysis of Oakland’s social and political structures, and the regimes and racialized social capital that shape its experiences enacting full-service community schools—a reform that is both targeted and universal in nature.

Methods and Data Sources

Because we aimed to understand how and why a diverse set of stakeholders come to know Oakland’s current community schools reform in different

ways, we used oral histories as a method to elicit the individuals' personal perceptions of this shared experience. Oral histories provide a valuable source of knowledge about past events while offering new, interpretive perspectives on the present (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Dougherty, 1999; Rogers & Blumenreich, 2013). This makes oral history a well-matched methodology for exploring the lived experience of reform, policymaking, and activism in an urban district, one that offers a unique approach to exploring how structural and relational conditions in Oakland can affect individual understandings and behaviors (Altenbaugh, 1997; Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008). In this way, oral history provides an alternative form of policy and reform analysis that helps magnify the micro-level processes that both shape and are shaped by a district's change efforts.

Dougherty argues that oral history as a methodology reveals less about fact than about meaning. Rather than yielding "discrete, value-free data" about past events, oral histories "elaborate emotionally laden, intentional constructions," where analysis targets the participants' subjective realities (Dougherty, 1999). Such perceptions can reveal individuals' relationships, ideologies, and reasons for participating in or resisting a district's reform efforts.

The relationship between a researcher's methodology and epistemological orientation is not always overt, but these elements are inextricably connected. Delgado Bernal (1998) explains that subjectivity in oral histories represents who we are, how we act, what we think, and what stories we tell; such perceptions become actualized within a framework that recognizes existing hegemonic histories. For her, the struggle to understand history is at its core a contention over power, meaning, and knowledge. Thus, this method assumes that unequal power relations, recounted through individual narratives, can explain, in part, the politics of urban district reform.

We selected a diverse group of participants through snowball sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After initial interviews with district leaders, we asked for additional references and contacted them if they rounded out the racial, socioeconomic, geographic, and professional perspectives of our pool. This method allowed us to uncover and analyze connections between various community members that we might not have encountered otherwise, and to include voices that often go overlooked in reform efforts. With each recommendation, we were introduced to teachers, parents, students, and others who, despite their respected and sometimes influential positions, occupied less powerful positions in the district's formal decision-making structures. When some of our participants observed that we, as outsiders, were willing to act on their recommendations to include seemingly nontraditional participants from their social networks, this sampling technique also aided in building

relationships and trust with certain community members—a challenging task, given the history of exploitation and marginalization that communities of color have at times experienced in the name of research (LeCompte, 1999).

In total, our data consist of oral histories from eight individuals who live and work in Oakland. We included participants across a wide range of positionalities in the district to investigate stakeholder-specific challenges as well as more general experiences associated with reform. Participants include one student, parent, teacher, principal, superintendent, board member, a former city official and community organizer, and a school reform advocate.¹ It was not our intention to compile a representative sample of every stakeholder group in Oakland. Rather, we sought to include individuals of different races, classes, genders, ages, ideological perspectives, and experiences with Oakland's reforms that could illustrate the range of tensions and opportunities inherent in a district's academic, social, and cultural priorities for its schools and families.

We conducted 2-hr oral history interviews using a semi-structured interview guide that addressed participants' backgrounds, experiences, and opinions of the district's past and present reforms, and how this could inform the district's future reforms. Interviews were transcribed and sent to participants for review upon request.

Data analysis was iterative. We developed codes both from our framework and from themes that emerged during analysis. From there, we coded transcripts collaboratively until we reached an acceptable level of interrater agreement among the research team. While we aimed to identify commonalities across the narratives, we also valued the individualized nature of the experiences. For this reason, in what follows we share each individual's narratives about his or her experiences, rather than present aggregated accounts of each theoretical construct across all participants, as is more conventional in qualitative research. We conclude with a discussion of the commonalities and tensions among their histories and how their experiences shed light on the district's current reform efforts.

Findings

A Superintendent

Superintendent Gary Yee smiled longingly as he recalled his earliest memories of trying to navigate what it meant to be an American in his East Oakland neighborhood school during the early 1950s. Sitting in his district's central office, he recounted the trials he faced not just as the only non-White student in his classes for several years, but in his community as a Chinese American,

born to working-class, immigrant parents whose customs and lifestyles seemed to differ sharply from the German and Portuguese immigrant families in his community. He attended Oakland's public schools just before the Post-World War II (WWII) city's economic prosperity began to recede. Canneries, bakeries, mills, and transportation-related industries still filled Oakland's city limits. A steady immigrant influx, coupled with scores of African American families who left the Deep South in search of the city's war industry jobs, provided a cheap labor force and led to a wide range of nationalities and ethnic enclaves settling throughout the city. The schools both reflected and reinforced Oakland's demographics.

As for Yee's own schooling, it was by all accounts a success that he attributed to multiple sources. Resourceful parents circumvented one of Oakland's prominent forms of structural racialization—the enactment of racially restrictive covenant agreements—to purchase a home with a desirable neighborhood school. Early teachers identified him as a "gifted" student, a distinction that brought with it additional academic resources. A nurturing fifth-grade teacher went out of his way to lend Yee materials unavailable at home and to facilitate individualized learning projects. Nationally, anti-communist sentiments and international security concerns further channeled the young Yee into specialized chemistry and physics programs that policymakers hoped would give our graduates an edge in math and science.

Yee's supportive school years paid off. He enjoyed a vibrant career as an Air Force meteorologist, Oakland public school teacher and principal, professor of education, senior administrator in California's community college system, and longtime Oakland school board member. Yet despite a successful run in academia, he eventually realized that he was best suited to serving the people of Oakland. For him, context mattered, not just as a theoretical construct, but as the motivation behind his life's work. In his words, he was "really place bound . . . I realized that even though I could teach in theory, what I did best was contextualize my academic work in educational administration to a real place." Thus, Yee and his family chose to work in Oakland, often in the public schools, and to give back to the city that gave them their start.

The events that most significantly punctuated Yee's lifetime of service in Oakland were those that connected civil rights and education. He explained,

For me, the biggest high and the biggest low [for the Oakland Unified School District] was Marcus Foster coming and Marcus Foster dying . . . His assassination was the same year I started teaching . . . In 1973 the Civil Rights movement was happening, and there was the war and the SLA and the Black Panthers. There was a lot of fervent turmoil. At the same time, we had this

Black superintendent who came and made big change in Oakland, who brought a lot of hope. He made community engagement a real possibility.

Foster's legacy of intense community support and engagement, progressive educational ideals, and well-rounded schools that developed the whole child were forefront in Yee's mind when he imagined what Oakland schools could be. For him, schools and communities went hand in glove.

Despite his embrace of the district's current community schools reform, Yee was less sanguine about other policy eras in the district's history, particularly those that systematically excluded district officials as influential reform coalition members. Looking back, he recalled the school board's public humiliation and forced inefficacy during the state takeover. "From a local governance perspective, it was powerlessness. Even though people elected you to make good decisions, your decisions were meaningless." He opposed the Gates-funded "small schools" movement because it was based on an unproven assumption that more "options" would foster system-wide competition and ultimately improve school quality. Such a strategy stood in contrast to Yee's thinking about education as a public good for every Oakland family. He was unequivocal in his concerns about the rapid expansion of charters in the district.

[Charters] meant an immediate decline in enrollment which impacted the district's fiscal solvency. Then the narrative became, "charters were good and not only was the district bad, but unionization was bad." The two messages got mixed up. It wasn't a fair fight.

Although he came to see some charter schools' utility, he retained strong support for the teachers union and helped create Oakland's first principals' union.

Today, Yee still embraces his predecessor's targeted universalism policy of district-wide full-service community schools plan. He acknowledges that a considerable amount of professional development and decision-making is required for schools to be able to engage in fine-grained responses to parents—to actually listen to what parents want. Yet he remains firm in his conviction that "the schools need to act in ways that create a symbiosis between the community and the schools." He concludes that a school district needs to "Put the community at the center. The school is just one player."

Yee also acknowledged the limitations of local governance coalitions. Because he viewed the district as nested within larger political contexts, he reasoned that "there are institutional forces over which local governance is just probably not powerful enough." While acknowledging the constraints on

establishing shared reform goals and agendas, he noted that effective local control meant sometimes resisting larger city and state forces, occasionally recognizing their inevitability, and other times embracing them to move an agenda forward.

Local governance also meant increasing community members' access to the district's decision-making structures. Echoing urban regime theory's notions of broad-based, inclusive governance, Yee noted,

My job is to improve the ability of the district to expand its reach to other people . . . educational decision-making should be a public enterprise. [That means] lots of community outreach at school board meetings, long school board meetings, and the election of school board members . . .

Yee believed that, aside from the state takeover years, the district as a whole operated fairly democratically over his lifetime. But he stressed that any question about a district's democratic nature also required asking whether democracy leads to better outcomes. For him, political negotiation and compromise were necessary only insofar as they helped move people to support the policies that he cared about. He also recognized that, although many voices had been heard, the district was still "a contested environment where many solutions create winners and losers."

Toward the close of his interview, Yee's eyes lit up. The conversation triggered a memory. He turned to his computer to scroll through his 2004 paper analyzing Oakland's school board governance over 40 years and read aloud his thoughts on democracy and the challenges and opportunities that arise from local educational control:

When difficult decisions are being considered, the community needs an opportunity to grieve, and a venue to be angry, to debate and argue its values, to protest. The answers will come not from a rational, technical search for the optimal solution, but a delicate political balancing act between multiple goods, among different political actors and their interests . . .

For Oakland's Superintendent, local community governance, in all its messiness, was an indispensable condition for furthering the public good.

A High School Student

Amid the lively atmosphere of an East Oakland Boys and Girls Club, Tyrone Young worked intently in the computer lab as he revised his Shakespearean analysis for British Literature. Pausing to engage in conversation, he timidly shared his experiences as a longtime student of the Oakland public school

system. Born and raised in East Oakland, Young grew up in a working-class family with a mother of Costa Rican descent and an African American father. As a senior at Oakland Technical High School, he has attended a total of five public schools in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). He warmly recalled the neighborhoods in which his elementary and high schools were situated, but two of his middle schools were in locations where it was “safe for us to go out at a *certain* [emphasis added] time.”

Young acknowledged that he struggled during his early elementary years, often alluding to how he and his friends would “act up,” fight, and even skip school—until a usually caring elementary school teacher buoyed him through his challenges. “I still had that I’m gonna fight you mentality, but the teacher worked with me a lot. So that was the first time I felt like a teacher has really been interested in me, like my personal self.” From that point on, his descriptions of relationships with friends were secondary to his elaborate descriptions of teachers and their pedagogical skills. He positively cited years where he made specific academic gains under particular teachers’ tutelage. He designated other teachers as “horrible” or “bad” when he felt that they were ineffective, unfair, and even cruel. But as the years went on, Young became more connected to his academic work. He described his learning through the lens of student–teacher relationships—even when it entailed negatively charged experiences.

While Young recalled many “good” teachers, he cited varying quality as the most significant problem in the district. He reasoned that he should not have attended OUSD schools because “teachers in other districts, they challenge you harder, so I feel like I would be more educated and they would work with you more.” He wondered aloud whether students who attended charter schools might be “more ahead” and possess excellent “work ethics” in comparison with OUSD students. His time in one of the district’s “small schools” left him critical of the small schools movement. “I was getting good grades with my eyes closed,” he confided, so he transferred to a traditional middle school to be more challenged.

As for the structural racialization of Oakland’s school system, Young was sensitive to the reality that students in his school’s highest track “academy” had a separate, superior experience, one that was physically and racially distinct from the majority of the school. He recalled a recent assembly where a student recited a poem. In it, she expressed that the advanced track was devoid of students of color. The event highlighted the racialized disparities within their school context. It also increased tensions among certain staff members, as some contested the student’s claims about racialized inequalities. Young wished all students in his school received the same quality of education as the select few, but he did not know how families could go about

advocating for such equitable schooling. In fact, he was vocal about what he saw as minimal parental and student input into key educational decision-making. He could not recall any instance in which the district reached out to parents or students for anything other than a mandate. For Young, parents and students had minimal power to initiate and affect reform goals and agendas; they seemed to be conspicuously absent members of the community's governing coalitions, despite being the ones most affected by district policies. He explained,

I feel like in schools students are . . . we're like the poor people in the regular world. We really don't have a lot of say so. We could give a suggestion but they don't have to necessarily follow it. The teachers are like middle class because they're teaching us but they're getting orders from someone else . . . Then there's the [school]board, which is making the students and the teachers do what they have to do and making us learn like they want us to learn when we shouldn't have to . . . we should have some say in how we want to learn and teachers should have some say in how they teach.

For him, the district seemed to be run mainly in an authoritarian manner. In fact, when asked how democratic he viewed his school system to be, Young was puzzled. Democratic decision-making, for him, was a fuzzy concept on which he could not elaborate. But he knew that neither the district nor his schools had solicited his family's views about what it hoped to receive from the schools. He decided that building community among students was a critical step toward advancing students' ideas. He hoped his work as a student "Culture Keeper" at Tech would help serve this purpose.

A Parent and Community Organizer

Joel Velasquez's journey as a community organizer started in the fall of 2011 when he learned that the school district would be closing his son's school, Lakeview Elementary, due to the rising costs of underenrollment. Concerned about his children's neighborhood school and frustrated that he only happened to hear of the news of the closure through the district web site, he found himself marching with dozens of other families to Oakland Technical High School to resist the decision. As parents took turns sharing their personal testimonies in front of local news stations, they began digging deeper and challenging the rationale behind school closures. He recalled, "Some of the most passionate, dedicated, educated people on this issue were all sitting on the [school] steps and within a split second we all connected." These burgeoning relationships and the subsequent social capital they produced aided in the formation of a parent-led education committee, which ignited a

yearlong movement to save Lakeview Elementary—an “organic” process that redefined his perception of community and parent engagement and the importance of public education.

The single father recounted these stories from his apartment near Oakland’s Lake Merritt. Flanked by colorful artwork and a painted Puerto Rican flag, he described growing up in a working-class, immigrant Puerto Rican family in the Bay Area. He watched his single mother face language and structural barriers that prohibited traditional forms of parent involvement on her part, even while he struggled in school. As a parent, his love of Oakland’s racial diversity kept him in the city and compelled him to keep his three children in the district’s public schools. But a lengthy work commute reinforced for him how little time and resources many parents have to engage in the schools. He recognized that many do not know where to begin. “It’s much easier to come in and say schools are failing and pretend to have a solution to it that parents are going to jump on,” snapping his fingers for emphasis, “but some just want a quick solution and don’t realize the systemic ripple effect that it’s going to have for the entire education system.”

He credits his growth as an educational activist to this education committee comprised of parents, teachers, and organizers, which eventually “occupied” Lakeview while it was slated for closure. Although sit-in organizers maintained fairly positive, peaceful relations with the police, Velasquez’s voluntary arrest led to a heated protest at the home of then-superintendent Tony Smith. Remembering those tense times, Velasquez was visibly frustrated.

From his perspective, it was unfair that students, parents, teachers, and the community were left “holding the bag on another bad decision” made by the district and other leaders. He believed that those leaders had inflated the number of district schools by opening small schools and charter schools to increase “options”—part of the district’s earlier portfolio model of reform, like other big city districts were experimenting with at the time. Velasquez expressed the inevitability of the community’s political mobilization to enact responsive educational policies:

What do you expect people to do when their voices are not heard? What do you expect people to do when after a year of their time, hundreds of hours of going to board meetings, [the district was] basically like, “you don’t matter”?

For him, the district’s policies were a contradiction. Closing schools that had a caring staff, after-school supports, and nonprofit partnerships, while marketing their vision for full-service community schools, seemed paradoxical. While the idea of full-service schools resonated with him, he questioned

the logic of closing community-supported schools while promoting a vision for community schools with much needed wrap-around services. "How can you create a community school when our school doesn't even have toner for the paper?" For Velasquez, the district's contradictory and questionable messages obfuscated its reform goals, and importantly, placed parent and community concerns behind those of the district.

Today, Velasquez serves as his school's parent-teacher association (PTA) president where he tries to motivate other parents to become involved, to the extent that they can, in district decisions. Despite contentious interactions with the district, he avows that he values communication across difference and hopes that sharing his narrative encourages dialogue among stakeholders. "Maybe it's not necessarily that the system's entirely broken; maybe it's the fact that we accept that the system is broken and we just don't think that we can make a difference." Despite all of the obstacles to getting parents like himself around the decision-making table, he still believes that public education is the key to strengthening Oakland's communities. From his standpoint, effective governance hinged largely on intense community engagement and broad, diverse coalitions of families. Both the district and its families were responsible for making this happen.

A Teacher, Coach, Activist, and Scholar

People in this community have always protected me, whether it's the families, the kids, or the folks who see what it is that we're really trying to do. So in some ways, I'm really lucky. I should have been fired . . . and I probably did enough to be let go, but I'm still here. Part of it is just a blind faith that I've had in this community; they'll protect folks who take risks on their behalf. (Duncan-Andrade, interview)

It was Dr. Jeff Duncan-Andrade's blind faith and the community's trust in him that helped ground him during tumultuous years working for Oakland Unified as a secondary school teacher, basketball coach, activist, and nearby professor of education.

Growing up in and around the LA area, Duncan-Andrade described himself as a hyperactive child with anger problems, who constantly clashed with teachers. Unlike his six siblings, he was exposed to college life and academic resources as an elite-level college athlete. Despite almost dropping out, he graduated Magna Cum Laude in English from UC Berkeley. He largely attributes his critical teaching pedagogy to negative experiences of being schooled instead of educated. His experiences led him to creatively work to keep the most marginalized students, mainly Black and Latino boys, in his classes and

on his basketball team as a way to provide a safe, nurturing environment in which youth could thrive academically, socially, and politically. He integrated his coach, teacher, and activist identities as he taught his students that when asked by the media to discuss sports, they had a responsibility to discuss the most pressing needs in their schools and in Oakland—not athletics.

Duncan-Andrade retells his stories from his downtown Oakland office at the nonprofit he co-founded, the Institute for Sustainable Economic, Educational, and Environmental Design. Here, he recounts a level of disorganization within the district that was palpable for anyone who entered school buildings in the most impoverished neighborhoods. Frustration with an unresponsive school district runs consistently through his narratives. Alluding to OUSD's structural arrangements that he saw as prohibiting more equitable learning environments, Duncan-Andrade noted, "It's benign neglect," he called it, "and the really sick part is that it's the kids and families that get blamed."

But it was not just a seemingly dysfunctional, neglectful central office that abandoned his students, he stressed. Education reformers from outside of Oakland mobilized enough resources to enact their educational agendas with minimal attention to the local context. Philanthropies such as Gates and Broad treated the students and teachers like "hamsters," in experiments, he declared emphatically, when they initially funded the small schools movement, for example, which spread already scarce resources too thin. In his words,

They gave us just enough money to hang ourselves . . . It was just enough for us to open all of these small schools and then create all of this disruption in kids' lives . . . But it failed because you can do small as bad as you can do big.

There was no attention to things that actually mattered.

He recalls navigating a bureaucracy and multiple reforms by engaging parents, students, and community members in his Step-to-College school program. Despite challenges to securing a stable location, low-income, students of color in the program have demonstrated exceptionally high academic success and graduation rates. Yet, while some members of the central office respect and admire his unconventional approach to supporting the district's most struggling students, he acknowledges that others feel he is "shaking the trees too hard." In response, he invokes Einstein's reminder that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly, but expecting different results. He likens the district's waves of reform to such insanity.

From his vantage point, he watched superintendents come and go with what he says were the same ideas, just repackaged under a different name.

Local democratic governance in which community members have genuine decision-making power was sorely lacking, in his view. Compounding the lack of community voice and influence was his seeming mistrust of some district officials. He construed particular school board members as using their positions as stepping stones in political careers. And while he supported the idea behind full-service community schools, he openly criticized the district's approach and their personnel. In his opinion, some staff hired for the schools' new wrap-around health clinics were merely "cutting their teeth in the ER of a trauma center so that they can raise that flag and then go work where they really want to work." He underscored that many of Oakland's most marginalized students suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and other socioemotional and psychological issues stemming from violence and poverty. He was decidedly firm in his opinion that full-service wrap-around services would not meaningfully help students if the people providing these services are not from or better familiar with the community. As he puts it, authentic community engagement in designing a reform that looks good on an office white board, but not yet on the ground, was critical to such an ostensibly democratic, communitarian reform. While full-service community schools served as a targeted universalism strategy that would theoretically alleviate certain racialized disparities, implementing them in a manner that authentically interrupted these patterns appeared more challenging in practice.

A Public School Principal

Principal Moyra Contreras worked in Oakland's public schools for over three decades as a bilingual teacher, parent, community member, and administrator. When speaking of her tenure in the district, her composed and soft-spoken demeanor did not belie the passion with which she led Melrose Leadership Academy (MLA). As she reflected on the racial and economic isolation she observed in Oakland's school system, she shared her school-level efforts to combat the patterns of racial and class inequity that resulted from the city's segregated educational system.

After serving as an elementary bilingual teacher, the Chilean-born educator transitioned into administration even before becoming a principal. From her new vantage point, she saw that many students were not being served by their neighborhood middle schools. She reasoned that if an elementary school could just keep its students 3 additional years, they would be spared the violence, segregation, and "hopelessness" characteristic of many middle schools in OUSD, particularly those in predominantly African American and Latino neighborhoods. Emboldened by the Oakland's small schools movement, Contreras opened MLA, which expanded her public elementary school's

campus from elementary grades to K-8. Although it proved difficult, she instituted a dual language Spanish immersion program and cultivated deep roots across communities, especially “with people unlike yourself.”

Today, the district regards MLA as a success. Its reputation attracts a diverse body of families, but she emphasized that relationships and politics complicate the governance of such a socioeconomically diverse space. She noted,

We have tremendous diversity here. We have now attracted families coming from private schools that were paying \$15,000 a year for a dual immersion program, and families that are homeless, and families that have doctorates and families that can't read, all together. That's our biggest asset and yet the biggest challenge. I have a daily challenge of just trying to make sure that everybody's voice is heard, that people are participating in the ways that they can feel comfortable and grow, and that they are sometimes putting themselves in situations that are not so comfortable for themselves so they can develop empathy for people and understanding for other people's life experiences.

For Contreras, governance was about honoring and empowering all voices in her racially and economically diverse school community. In providing space for all of her constituents, she hoped to mitigate the advantages exerted by her families with more intergroup social and economic capital, as well as the racial and class tensions that existed across various groups.

Contreras described analogous social and political challenges at the central office level, though she witnessed the district's racial and class tensions play out most poignantly at her individual campus where she spent most of her time. In one instance, after a middle-class, Latina student convinced her class to ignore an African American male classmate, the boy charged toward the girl and placed his hands around her throat. Neither student was physically injured. The girl's parents both held leadership roles in the school's governing bodies, but the boy came from a poor, single-parent family who played a less prominent role in the school's affairs. The principal worked with both families to aim for “restorative justice” by dialoguing with them about MLA's philosophy that all students were everyone's students. If they removed the boy from the MLA community, as some urged, whose student would the boy then become?

In her eyes, this anecdote illustrated the big ideas driving the district's full-service community schools reform. She wanted the district to be a “safe place” that minimized “power plays and politics” from decisions affecting students of color, but she cautioned that the reform would not achieve its intended outcomes if it did not address each community's unique

demographic contexts. For Contreras, working in Oakland was a political choice, and one that she was fervently committed to. It was “harder in a lot of ways, less money than easier places, more conflict, more complex variables, and often [entailed] a lack of trust between Oakland, the community and the teachers and administrators.” For this long-standing public school principal, all of Oakland Unified’s students were her and her colleagues’ responsibility. Community-based reforms would require such mindfulness if they were ever going to dissolve the racial and economic segregation that characterized so many of the district’s schools.

An Education Reformer

Growing up in a middle-class family attending high-quality public schools in the greater Minneapolis and Los Angeles areas, Jonathan Klein described himself as a hyperactive kid who finished his work early and thus channeled his energy into creative, academic tasks. Shifting restlessly in his chair and gesturing demonstratively as he described his journey to founding and leading Great Oakland (GO) Public Schools, he showed remnants of that high-energy child. His career trajectory revealed the ways in which he channeled his energies into various aspects of educational reform. A self-described “White Optimistic Humanist with Jewish and Christian roots,” he articulated the privilege he felt in benefiting from academic honors programs. His privilege, he noted, was most experienced by the “affluent and/or white kids” at his high school. That privilege followed him to Yale, where he polished his relationship-building and listening skills in his role as student body president. Klein explained,

I realized that . . . my student body presidency or my student government experiences were primarily about throwing awesome social events for already pretty privileged and affluent, fortunate young people. So a big piece of my decision to enter education after college was about trying to put those skills to work for children or communities who were historically underserved.

With this realization, Klein joined Teach for America (TFA), thus beginning his journey into the realm of education reform.

After teaching elementary school for 2 years outside of Los Angeles, he worked as TFA’s Bay Area Executive Director for 4½ years. He later earned his MBA from UC Berkeley and then reentered education, serving as the Executive Director of the Oakland Schools Foundation in the midst of OUSD’s small schools movement. From there, he worked as the special assistant to Oakland’s state administrator during the state takeover

and eventually took a position with the Rogers Family Foundation, an Oakland-based venture philanthropy that was active in supporting local educational initiatives. This position evolved into the founding of his current organization, GO Public Schools, an advocacy organization aiming to “organize, develop, and educate and inform leaders” to advance policies for measuring, supporting, and improving teacher effectiveness, increasing high-quality school options for every child, and supporting broader systems-level governance. One of Klein and GO’s fundamental assumptions was that successful educational transformation necessitated both bottom-up and top-down input and leadership. In this way, he embraced the participation of various stakeholders in the mobilization and maintenance of the district system’s governance structures.

At the core of Klein’s comments was his continuous attention to the importance of community engagement, relationship- and coalition building. He observed that stakeholders most frequently engaged with the district and school board reactively. He explained, “The people in the room are either the district staff, senior district staff, and/or labor representatives, and then whatever particular school community feels threatened by the decision making . . .” He expressed his desire to build a “proactive constituency,” emphasizing the importance of “intentional communication” and an infrastructure that allows ideas to filter through educational organizations and out to the broader community to build public accountability, transparency, and greater civic capacity.

He also stressed the confounding element of trust. As the special assistant to the state administrator, he recalled that district personnel were distrustful of him as an outsider trying to lead various initiatives. Beyond internal district dynamics, Klein saw Oakland’s educational landscape as a generally distrustful space. He explained,

One of the things that really holds within the leadership team, within the district organization, within the district versus charters, within the union versus district, within the district and the community, between parents and the schools in the districts, is that we don’t trust each other. There’s a lot of evidence for why we shouldn’t trust each other.

While he acknowledged the high degree of mistrust and disparate benefits generated by Oakland’s various waves of reform, Klein generally approved of the reform efforts instituted under state control. Specifically, he praised the community-focused nature of small schools and charters, commenting enthusiastically that these projects provided “programmatic diversity and options” for parents. He believed that Oakland’s charters were “not being created by

white millionaires from out of town,” but by dissatisfied local residents and stakeholders. Although he supported Oakland’s current vision for high-quality full-service community schools in every neighborhood, he critiqued the district for executing the current reforms in a slow, silo-type manner, and for its lack of transparency and sustained community engagement.

When asked, he conceded that mistrust within the district was particularly acute across racial lines. He commented that the small schools and charters were clustered in predominantly Latino communities, which exacerbated distrust and cynicism within Oakland’s African American community and inhibited the development of intergroup social capital. For him, the problem was primarily one of communication. With more “intentional communication” and a commitment to engagement and co-construction of policies with communities, he judged that these racialized patterns could be mitigated. Despite his contention that Oakland was a place where his aspiration to be a practicing “white anti-racist” was supported by the city’s diverse culture, he was clear that its seemingly egalitarian spirit and social justice orientation had yet to benefit all marginalized communities equitably, particularly working-class, African Americans.

A Board Member

The Oakland Unified School District Board Member, David Kakishiba, approached his role based largely on his upbringing in Sacramento. Raised in a “working-class neighborhood housed on the ‘better side’ of a railroad track divide,” his educational and professional experiences were driven by a combination of feelings of anger, embarrassment, and mistreatment as the son of Japanese immigrants interned during World War II. These formative years shaped his understanding of structural barriers for people of color and ultimately the ideological attitudes that motivate his work as a board member and community activist. He recalled,

I felt treated differently . . . because of being Japanese. In junior high and high school I had those kinds of experiences and saw other friends treated differently . . . mostly my black friends and I were . . . pretty much ignored and pushed out. So either because of race, because we worked with dirt—we’re gardeners—and then being an immigrant and not speaking English, I always felt embarrassed about parent teacher conferences. They were done in the daytime and my dad was working 12 hours a day and my mom didn’t speak English. She was very intimidated . . . Often times, teachers chuckled about my parents not being able to make parent-teacher conferences in the daytime. Of course, never were any accommodations made to meet in the evening . . . So I grew up pissed off. I wanted to change the world.

Kakishiba's experiences led him to UC Berkeley where he dropped out to work as an activist in San Francisco. Through his work in the Asian community, he became the Executive Director of the East Bay Asian Youth Center (EBAYC), where he remained in the same role over 30 years later. He expressed surprise at his dual role as activist and board member in OUSD, as he revealed strong emotions about having a "love-hate relationship with school." Despite mixed feelings, when asked to talk about the tension between his feelings about school and being a school board member in his 12th year of service, he quickly warmed. He aspired to be a board member to be "part of building schools as arenas of progression, not of regression."

Kakishiba underscored the multiple, inherent contradictions in charter schools and other choice policies. For example, he pointed to the racialized nature of universal, not targeted school choice or portfolio district models, particularly as such policies had the effect of increasing racial segregation:

I think allowing for parent choice, . . . that's probably an act of democratic participation in using public services . . . but the flip side of that choice is that you get to be with who you want to be with, which can re-segregate by class, by race. Then you see a concentration of a homogeneous population, school by school. We see that in charter schools and we see that in district schools. So there's a tension.

In this way, he detected the risks to communities when choice policies interact with different racial communities' strong intragroup social capital. The result—resegregation—could unintentionally prevent the formation of more intergroup social capital. As he continued, he alluded to the need for more targeted universalism policies by focusing more intentionally on the neediest schools to increase intergroup social capital in those settings. He explained,

If I was a kid or a parent I would like my neighborhood school to be really kick ass, so for me as a board member my focus is on trying to do that in the schools that we're not doing well in, which is in the tough neighborhoods. Our highest priority should be to transform those schools into good schools without importing a bunch of middle class people. It should be grounded in that neighborhood, and some real social capital should be built there, but if it's all black because that's who lives there or all Latino because that's who lives there or it's in Chinatown and its all Asian because that's who lives there . . . well, [that school may be] a great school for those kids. But I wouldn't send my kids there. Keep those kids in the district, earn the ADA, and screw the charters. But then those kids need to get out. They need to get out of their neighborhood, look at the real world and see everybody. Or the kids end up becoming racist

because you're cocooned in your neighborhood and you just need to see the bigger world. Public schools [need to] figure out how to make it a safe and welcoming place and a school of choice for all neighborhood kids and families.

For Kakishiba, racial segregation was complex and not easily overcome by any single district policy. Still, he remained optimistic about the district's current trajectory for full-service community schools. At the same time, he voiced concerns that the district's policies merely represented a list of appealing reforms without a clear theory of change. That is, while the policy appeared to target many racial and structural disparities, perceptions of its competing goals could undermine the policy's coherence and, consequently, dampen support for such ambitious reform. From his perspective, large urban districts too easily defaulted to centralized management, even amid seemingly community-based reforms, which left many stakeholders to occupy marginal positions in governance. Should that happen this time, the board member was unequivocal in his projection: Centralization had never worked in Oakland and it was not going to work now.

A City Official, Community Activist, and Longtime Educator

Sitting in an office of the university building where she once roamed the halls as a doctoral student, Dr. Kitty Kelly Epstein detailed the multifaceted journey that motivated her commitment to activist scholarship and the improvement of educational conditions for Oakland's communities of color. As a White woman from a working-class upbringing in Los Angeles, she situated her work in early feelings of disdain and discomfort attending an all-White high school in Los Angeles and her subsequent relocation to the Bay Area to become active in the thriving Civil Rights Movement.

Epstein warmly recalled her arrival onto Oakland's multiracial landscape, and the emotional and intellectual work in which she engaged when she became a teacher at the public alternative school, Emiliano Zapata Street Academy. From this initial entrance into Oakland's educational system, she continued to serve Oakland's community. She worked as a board member of the Street Academy, teacher professional developer, and the Education Director under Mayor Ronald Dellums. She was instrumental in instituting programs to recruit and support teachers of color, which were associated with increases in the diversity of Oakland's teaching force. She even serves as the host of a bi-weekly public radio program, *Education Today*, in which she covers international, national, and local policy issues. One thread throughout her roles is seen in her keen attention to the value of community engagement and activism. As Oakland's Education Director, she facilitated a "massive

task force process,” in which she convened a broad cross-section of individuals in large-scale policymaking and whereby two thirds of the resolutions were implemented. As a Street Academy teacher and board member, she described the isolationist political strategies she and the staff engaged in to maintain the school’s public, but alternative status amid district and state pressure to regularize the school.

Epstein summed up her inclusive thinking: “I think we need more local community organizing—the vastest amount of authority people can be given at their own local level, the better.” In addition to the inclusion of community voices, Epstein’s personal activism demonstrated how effectual community efforts could be in bringing about real change. For her, the civic capacity required for successful, democratic reform already existed; local community members were willing and able to activate such change, if only they were granted the requisite access and opportunities to do so.

Epstein demonstrated a sharp attentiveness to racial disparities. She detailed how Oakland’s policies disproportionately hurt communities of color, thus highlighting the racialized practices, norms, and arrangements that maintained racial inequality. In one instance, she recalled her participation in a “black and white political committee to oppose an agenda that white progressives considered to be good because the basic ongoing theme of white progressives is that we know best.” Frustrated by staged protests and other mobilizations of social capital by the predominantly White residents of Oakland’s affluent hill communities, she described how the committee served to refute the White progressive agenda and reveal its implicit racial biases. In addition to her cultivation of interracial coalitions and her attentiveness to racial agendas, she consistently promoted targeted initiatives that explicitly addressed inequality across racial lines.

She argued that bureaucratic authority and the need to attend to fiscal constraints and accountability often trumped community desires, particularly in the dissolution of the small schools movement. As for the state takeover, Kitty explained,

[P]eople making decisions in this country about how public schools and poor kids should be accountable don’t have any system like that for the education of their own children. All those private schools, the elite ones, and are run completely independently and are only accountable to the parents of the kids, the people that fund them, and the teachers who go there . . .

While much of her class-based critiques were aimed at outsiders stepping into Oakland’s reforms, she also remained suspect of the district personnel’s seeming lack of concern for certain racialized practices and their outcomes. As she put it,

... [P]art of [community schools] is having teachers who live the neighborhood. If you're going to say that you have community schools, then do you care that the people in the neighborhood get to work in the multimillion-dollar enterprise that you run? And if you don't, I don't know how community-based it really is.

At the same time, Epstein readily acknowledged the district's disempowered position. She noted how macro-level testing and high-stakes accountability policies, fiscal constraints, and state oversight curbed the district's capacity to enact policies that fully attended to community demands. Despite her skepticism of Oakland's commitment to broad-based coalition building and more egalitarian governance, Epstein was certain of one thing: Oakland's most marginalized communities would continue to advocate for more equitable, democratic schools. All they needed was someone to listen.

Discussion

This oral history analysis contributes to the knowledge bases on urban district reform, empirical analyses of Oakland's school district, and full-service community schools in several ways. First, the narratives animate macro-level political analyses and case studies of urban district reform by using a unique methodological tool for investigating the ways in which multiple stakeholders can experience a reform from the bottom-up. By examining each individual's lived histories and different forms of engagement with the school district's current and former reform agendas, this collection of micro-level historical narratives serves not to depict how entire urban regimes coalesce, disband, or perhaps never fail to take off, but instead how individuals, each representing a unique constituency, make sense of a district reform agenda based in large part on their prior experiences and sociopolitical positionalities within the district's power structures. In this way, this study complements the macro-level research on urban district reform by moving beyond examinations of coalition types and the processes surrounding them, to investigating how single stakeholders come to interpret, support, or oppose particular policies and their stated objectives.

These oral histories also enhance the theoretical base on the crucial role that civic capacity plays in building and maintaining coalitions to further any urban district reform. Despite broad support for the full-service community schools and its ultimate goals, long-standing racial tensions and a general perception of a lack of sincere interest on the part of the district to engage historically underrepresented racial and social groups in decision-making appeared to undermine an unprecedentedly redistributive, democratic reform. In this way, these findings illuminate the specific manner in which historical

patterns of racial and political tension prohibited authentic collaboration across groups. For Oakland's district leaders, educators, and community members, powerful historical legacies overshadowed one of the most equity-minded, communitarian reforms the district had ever attempted. The familiar narratives of distrust, racialized marginalization, and limited opportunities for authentic community engagement and interrace dialogue seemed to repeat themselves even as the central office intended to eschew old ways of relating with its communities. Thus, this study also extends the emerging literature on community schools by shedding light on the powerful hold that the political and racial past can have on the implementation of full-service community schools policies.

This study also contributes to the literature on structural racialization and targeted universalism in an educational context. Despite the reforms' fundamental promotion of targeted universalism, or policies that account for differences across racialized groups, several stakeholders maintained misgivings about their district reform's likelihood of allocating more equitable, redistributive resources to the neediest communities. The upshot was the persistence of structural racialization, as Powell theorizes. Based on these patterns, education officials would be wise to proactively account not just for different racial and political conditions, but different racial and political histories, as they conceptualize and enact targeted universalism reforms.

More specifically, the Oakland case reveals how individuals came to understand the promises and limitations of a seemingly democratic, community-based reform based not on any detached assessment of its potential merits or drawbacks, but on their own subjective realities and their past experiences with the district's other reforms and their own forms of social capital. Their histories provided a framework for their interpretations, stances, and ultimate attitudes toward district-wide community schools. Standing alone, each oral history reveals individuals' contests over power and democratic access to an urban district's decision-making. Together, they underscore the ineluctable political tensions that go along with such a communitarian reform, particularly amid a legacy of reforms that appeared not to successfully engage a broad coalition of community members nor seemed to advance the interests of some of the most marginalized groups. Despite the district's present ideological commitments to the reform, it seemed that Oakland's leaders had inherited a complicated set of suspicions and doubts from its predecessors' inadequate reform efforts.

These oral histories also complement the field of literature on full-service community schools by detailing the specific ways in which different normative conceptions about what a community-based reform should look like can produce starkly different perceptions about its benefits for different

constituencies. Those participants who were least engaged in the district's formal decision-making in the past appeared to be most skeptical of the community schools' potential to achieve their stated aims. The absence of more direct outreach by the central office in the past seemed to prime the most marginalized stakeholders for continued disappointment. At the same time, several of those stakeholders with the greatest access to central office structures also revealed a significant degree of doubt that the district could earnestly implement a bottom-up reform without more strategic attempts to engage in a more decentralized design and implementation.

At the core of most community members' doubts was not a rejection of the full-service community school concept. Indeed, almost everyone we interviewed enthusiastically embraced the idea of such a communitarian, equity-minded reform. Dampening their enthusiasm, however, was a fundamental lack of trust. Distrust about the district's genuine intent, as well as about the district's ability to authentically engage a cross-section of racial, socioeconomic, and professional interests, ran as a strong theme throughout their reflections. Such patterns both animate and reinforce theories about the powerful role of trust in building coalitions to support empowerment-oriented urban regimes, and in fostering more democratic, community-based district reforms.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Note

1. The larger study from which this analysis is taken contains more participants, including a regional venture philanthropist, union representative, more parents and youth, and more community organizers.

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